

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI

OPERATIONAL ART IN THE COUNTER-TERROR WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature:

13 May 2002

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: 1C		7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207	
8. Title (Include Security Classification): Operational Art in the Counter-Terror War in Afghanistan			
9. Personal Authors: LtCol Bruce D. MacLachlan USMC			
10. Type of Report: FINAL		11. Date of Report: 13 May 2002	
12. Page Count: 28 12A Paper Advisor (if any): Dr. Vego			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Operational Art, Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan, global war on terrorism			
15. Abstract: The applicability of operational art to the global war on terrorism is examined by analyzing how it has been applied to Operation Enduring Freedom. This paper reviews the strategic context of this campaign by defining its end state and objectives within the context of operational factors such as space, time and forces. Critical enemy factors are analyzed then a review of the execution to include concept of operations, levels of effort, effects on enemy centers of gravity, sequencing and synchronization are tied to operational level activities such as C2, intelligence, and logistics. This paper concludes by examining some tentative lessons learned during Operation Enduring Freedom.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-3556		20. Office Symbol: C	

Security Classification of This Page Unclassified

Preface

This paper will argue that the application of operational art was equally important to the planning and conduct of operations in Afghanistan as it has been in any previous war. In spite of the inherent differences between a counter-terrorism campaign and more conventional conflicts, most of the same principles, processes and conditions that define operational art still apply. The sound practice of operational art is essential if U.S. objectives are to be achieved within reasonable costs. This includes formulating a sound, executable theater strategy, the integration of military and non-military elements of national power and the proper shaping and sequencing of major events to reach an acceptable end state.

Assessing the effectiveness or success of *Enduring Freedom* is difficult at this stage. This is an operation still in process, and only limited information is publicly available. Insufficient time has elapsed to fully assess this operation success or failure. That will depend upon the outcome of future events, the trajectory of which, is not yet determined. Additionally, the theater commander's overall strategy, his planning factors and assumptions can only be speculated at this time. This paper estimates what theater level strategy and plans were by evaluating public statements and reconstructing the sequence of combat operations and the flow of forces as obtained from open sources. This inherently leads to some inaccuracy, and perhaps to faulty conclusions. The intent of this paper is not to assess success or failure, but rather it is to demonstrate that the sound practice of operational art is critical to the conduct of this type of war.

Introduction

As the initial campaign in a wider war against global terrorism, *Operation Enduring Freedom* will set the stage for the conduct of subsequent counter-terrorism operations. This war is fundamentally different in many respects to the type of war for which U.S. doctrine on operational art and campaigning was developed. It has been a counter-terrorism campaign fought within a MOOTW environment against an enemy that is not a nation state. Some very obvious distinctions exist between this kind of conflict and the more traditional wars that the U.S. military is generally trained and equipped to fight. How then is operational art, as it is most commonly understood and applied by U.S. doctrine, relevant to this war?

Joint Publication 1 warns, “Without operational art war would be a set of disconnected engagements with relative attrition the only measure of success or failure.”¹ This is no less true for *Enduring Freedom* and the wider war against terrorism than for any other conflict. Although this war is indeed different, the familiar framework of strategy and tactics, linked by operational art, and subordinate to national strategic objectives is not only relevant but essential. Operational art has been practiced in *Enduring Freedom* and remains an indispensable element to both tactical and strategic success. Whether operational level planning and execution have been optimized or properly applied to this conflict remains uncertain just yet. Still, operational art remains a decidedly important aspect to the application of military force in Afghanistan and in the broader war. Determining how operational art applies to this type of conflict is among the foremost challenges to U.S. military leaders.

Desired End State and Objectives

Articulating a desired end state (DES) and then developing attainable strategic objectives provides the foundation for operational level planning. DES and national strategic objectives flow directly to theater strategic objectives. From there, the operational commander establishes intermediate objectives that lead to the attainment of theater strategic objectives.

Desired End State. The ultimate objectives for the U.S. in this war are to prevent further terrorist attacks against America and her allies, to eliminate or neutralize terrorist organizations with global reach and to deter governments around the world from sheltering or sponsoring terrorists. Specifically for Afghanistan the DES was most likely a stable government that does not harbor terrorists, threaten its neighbors or serve as a refuge for the drug trade.

National Strategic Objectives. The strategy to accomplish this end state includes the use of multiple elements of national power to locate, neutralize and attack terrorist organizations. These tools will be similarly utilized to deter hostile governments from assisting terrorists and to reassure, bolster and stabilize more friendly governments to obtain their cooperation and assistance. Isolating terrorist organizations and the governments who sponsor them has been a stated goal of the Administration. Maintaining regional stability, especially in South Asia and the Middle East, are also crucial to this strategy. This includes preventing armed conflict between India and Pakistan, reducing tensions over Israel in the Middle East and assisting Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in order to maintain their continued cooperation. The strategic interests of Russia, Iran, Pakistan in addition to these Central Asian states must be factored into policy and actions related to Afghanistan.

More specific elements of the national strategy as they pertain to *Enduring Freedom* are the neutralization or elimination of the Al-Qaeda network, and the overthrow of the Taliban regime. Homeland defense and prevention of additional terrorist attacks constitute the defensive

aspect of the strategy. Offensive actions (or actions to gain the strategic initiative) include military operations by the U.S., its allies and coalition partners. International law enforcement actions financial and humanitarian assistance are other key components. Information operations support each of these sub-components of the overall strategy. Information sharing, both interagency within the U.S., and between America and friendly governments is necessary for the overall strategy and its parts to be effective.²

National Military Objectives. National military objectives must support these broader objectives. They focus on applying military force in conjunction with other elements of national power against terrorist networks worldwide. This includes homeland defense, contingency planning, the establishment of advance bases, intelligence gathering, logistics (especially strategic airlift) , command and control as well as security assistance and theater engagement activities by CINCs worldwide.

Theater Strategic Objectives. Theater specific objectives for the CINC were the destruction or neutralization of the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the defeat of the Taliban military and overthrow of the Taliban regime. Corollary or supporting objectives were to gain intelligence on the capabilities and intentions of the Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups and to conduct humanitarian operations to relieve civilian suffering in Afghanistan.

Intermediate Objectives. To accomplish his theater strategic objectives, the CINC had to establish intermediate objectives. Some, but not many, of these were physical objectives to be occupied or controlled by U.S. military forces. Other physical objectives included intermediate logistics, and air bases, communications sites etc. Almost all of these have remained outside of Afghanistan. Additional intermediate objectives can more accurately be described as conditions. These included the establishment of air supremacy over Afghanistan early in the campaign,

establishing initial lodgments for ground forces and establishing communications and closer ties with United Front forces.

Operational Factors: Space, Time and Forces

Freedom of action is one of the primary goals of the operational level commander. It is attained principally through the proper assessment of the operational factors of space, time and forces.³ The physical dimensions of the theater encompassed, air, land, sea and space in which military operations could be conducted relatively unencumbered by enemy action. The principal limitations here were geographical (distance and topography) and political (limitations on basing or the conduct of offensive operations).

Space. The remoteness of Afghanistan stretched even the United States' formidable military capabilities to their limits. Afghanistan is nearly 650,000 square miles in size. Most of it is dry, high in elevation, rugged and primitive. Harsh weather restricts operations due to extreme seasonal temperatures.⁴ Afghanistan is over 300 miles inland from the ocean, Kabul over 700 miles, making employment of ground forces extremely difficult. These distances limited deployment to relatively light ground forces. Air routes from the east coast of the U.S. to Afghanistan are over 10,000 miles in length. Assuming that in-flight refueling and favorable over-flight rights are obtained, it takes a minimum of 24 hours just to fly equipment, supplies and combat personnel into Afghanistan. Even the fastest military shipping requires approximately two weeks transit time to reach the coast of Pakistan from the U.S. east coast through the Suez Canal.⁵ Even within the theater, distances from suitable bases are significant. Air bases in Turkey are nearly 2,000 miles from Afghanistan while bases in the Persian Gulf, home to several key C2, intelligence and logistics hubs, are approximately 1,500 miles away.⁶ Operating over great distances retards operational tempo. It also places a premium on assets such as aerial

tankers and heavy lift aircraft. Similarly, the distances from the Indian Ocean, the lack of ports, and airfields or improved land routes inland served to inhibit the deployment of large conventional forces.

Time. Factors of space directly influence factors of time. In this case, the enemy possessed very little capability to deny U.S. forces access. However, buildup time for U.S. combat power was inhibited by the nature of the area of operations. The principal challenge was balancing preparation time against political pressure for a military response and the requirement to prevent the enemy from consolidating or escaping from Afghanistan. The next major time consideration was planning the duration of the operation. Given the limited number of intermediate objectives and the relative inferiority of the enemy, it is unlikely that time constraints were considered to be significant. Still, time is a commodity that can be used by the enemy to regroup, escape or to plot additional attacks against the U.S. and its allies.

Force. Appendix I provides an estimate of overall forces available to the CINC, the United Front and the enemy. The CINC had air, land, maritime and SOF forces at his disposal but also had to factor coalition and United Front forces into his planning. Time and space factors limited the size of U.S. forces that could be deployed into the area of operations, especially early on. There appears to have been no serious plan to flow heavy ground forces into Afghanistan due to these factors. This resulted in the formulation of an operational scheme that relied mostly upon air power and SOF support to the United Front early in the operation followed by relatively small scale conventional ground operations from November until now. These limitations on deploying ground units into Afghanistan were generally offset by the qualitative superiority of U.S. forces and their lopsided air power advantage. They nevertheless served to limit options for the CINC and to reduce overall operational flexibility.

The interrelationship of time, space and force factors influenced the planning and conduct of *Enduring Freedom* by imposing limitations and suggesting areas of relative strength or weakness. The next major consideration was to assess critical factors pertaining to the enemy.

Critical Factors

Analyzing critical factors is one of the most important steps in operational design. Assessing enemy strengths, weaknesses and centers of gravity should frame the timing, methods and physical objectives for any major operation.⁷

Enemy Critical Strengths. In reality, the U.S. dealt with two separate enemies in Afghanistan, even though they frequently fought together. The Taliban may have had unsophisticated conventional military capabilities, but they were tough fighters and could be quite deadly in small unit actions. They were also familiar with local terrain as well as being acclimated to the weather, elevation and harsh conditions of this country. The Taliban also had control of nearly all the major cities in the country. Cities can be used quite effectively as military strong points, and they tend to reduce the effectiveness of tactical air strikes. Finally, the limited number of airfields, roads and improved facilities would make it relatively easy for the Taliban to calculate where U.S. forces might be employed.

The Al-Qaeda was significantly different. Their chief strengths were their morale, leadership, strong adherence to operational security (OPSEC) procedures and overall secretiveness. Their decentralized organizational structure and shadowy nature make them relatively difficult to locate or to defeat in single engagements. They were also generally the best trained and equipped fighters on the enemy side, many having served in Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo or with the Mujahudeen against the Russians. Additionally, Al-Qaeda has the demonstrated capability and will to conduct attacks against the U.S. well beyond Afghanistan.

Enemy Critical Weaknesses. The greatest strategic weakness of the Taliban was their unpopularity in Afghanistan. Initially welcomed for bringing order to the country, the Taliban soon became hated by ethnic groups in the country for their ruthlessness and unwillingness to share power.⁸ Additionally, they possessed no air defense capability beyond the local level. Their lack of sophisticated Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets, the weaknesses of their C2 systems and their general lack of long range fires left them unable to detect, challenge or interdict U.S. or coalition forces entering the country. They had no apparent means of waging the war outside Afghanistan either. Also, the Taliban military was not a unified armed force but rather a collection of sympathetic groups aligned more on tribal and ethnic lines than upon true devotion to the Taliban political philosophy.

Al-Qaeda was also burdened with significant weaknesses. Dependent upon the Taliban for heavy artillery, tanks and air defense, they were incapable of conducting independent combined arms operations. They were also unpopular inside Afghanistan. Most ethnic groups opposed to Taliban rule strongly resented the presence of Arabs in the country. Like the Taliban, they were also highly vulnerable to air attack or combined arms operations.

Center of Gravity. The Taliban strategic centers of gravity were its leadership and its control over the capital of Kabul. Operationally, the Taliban center of gravity was its ground forces since it had no other significant military capability. Once Afghanistan's limited air defense capabilities were neutralized and the logistical and space limitations that impeded U.S. air attacks were overcome, these centers of gravity were highly vulnerable.

The Al-Qaeda strategic center of gravity was and remains its leadership, specifically, Osama Bin Laden. At the operational level, the Al Qaeda center of gravity was also its ground forces, but this pertains only to the Afghanistan area of operations. In the broader context of the

theater and the global war on terrorism, the Al-Qaeda operational center of gravity remains its highly dispersed terrorist cells. Other than its ground forces in Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda centers of gravity are less vulnerable to conventional military attacks or air strikes .

Enemy strengths, weaknesses and centers of gravity must be understood within the context of the operational factors (time, space and forces) that determined U.S. military capabilities. Comparing these factors to theater strategic and intermediate objectives led next to the development of an operational scheme and the development of specific plans. The CINC's overall scheme and the specific plans to achieve operational objectives are not yet publicly available. At this time, they can only be estimated by examining the execution of tactical actions and then placing these events within their operational context.

Execution

A reasonable estimate of the operational planning framework for *Enduring Freedom* can be made by reviewing key events to date (See Appendix II). The specific phasing suggested in this table is notional, but it corresponds to the timing and apparent purpose of tactical actions and major operations conducted thus far. The execution of operations during *Enduring Freedom* is best understood by estimating the overall concept of operations, the level of effort allocated to specific functions and tasks, how these actions were directed against enemy centers of gravity and how operations were sequenced and synchronized.

Concept of Operations. Initial operations relied primarily upon a mixture of air attacks, SOF actions and support to the United Front. These were designed to maintain pressure on the enemy until sufficient shaping operations and the buildup of combat and combat service support units in theater provided more favorable force ratios to begin decisive operations. Thereafter, decisive operations were conducted from early November until the end of March to complete the

defeat of enemy forces. Since then, activities have focused on mopping up operations, intelligence exploitation and humanitarian relief, along with some limited nation building and security assistance actions.

Afghanistan can roughly be divided into four geographical regions: north, south, east and west. Within these regions, different operational objectives were assigned and different types of activities were prioritized depending upon the phase of the operation. For example, in the North, priority was given to humanitarian relief operations, SOF actions and air support for United Front attacks on Masar-e-Sharif, Konduz and Taloqan. Complementary attacks were conducted against targets in the eastern region—Kabul, Jalalabad and Gardez.⁹ In the south, Marines supported by SOF and interagency personnel established Camp Rhino threatening enemy forces at Kandahar. In the west, air attacks on Herat and Shindand supported United Front capture of these cities while humanitarian relief operations provided food to civilians. Information operations such as leaflet drops and Commando Solo broadcasts were conducted throughout the country and were timed to complement air strikes and United Front offensives. Once adequate forces were in place and sufficient attrition was inflicted upon the enemy, larger conventional ground forces were introduced to eliminate remaining pockets of resistance, as was done during Operation Anaconda in March.

The Marine and SOF forces at Camp Rhino bear specific mention. Although a small force, it proved instrumental in accelerating the Taliban's collapse in Kabul and Kandahar. This force directly threatened enemy forces in Kandahar, and severed the main enemy resupply and reinforcement route to Kabul along Highway 1. The force was employed concurrently with aerial attacks and major United Front offensives in Kabul, Kandahar and Tora Bora. Several small but completely one-sided engagements between Marines and the enemy convinced the

Taliban that their positions to the north were no longer tenable. Kabul and Kandahar soon fell to United Front forces. The deployment of this force from amphibious ships over 350 miles away was a significant feat in itself. The combat power that the U.S. was able to apply along an exposed southern flank proved to be tactically decisive in this phase.¹⁰

Levels of Effort. The preponderance of U.S. efforts in this campaign was focused on air operations which is understandable given the nature of the theater, enemy vulnerabilities and the inherent goal of minimizing casualties. These factors kept U.S. conventional ground force levels low, resulting in what some critics have described as an excessive reliance upon the United Front to conduct ground combat operations. The concept of operations was criticized by some in the government and media for not providing more aerial support to United Front attacks earlier in the campaign and for not introducing larger numbers of U.S. ground forces to seal off and prevent enemy escape into Pakistan and elsewhere.¹¹ The validity of such criticism will not be addressed here, but it is important to note the additional risks involved in such operations as well as the logistical limitations that confronted the CINC at that point in time.

Air operations should be further broken down between U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy. Early in the campaign, the majority of combat missions were flown from Navy carriers in the Indian Ocean. In December, Naval aircraft had accounted for approximately 75 percent of the sorties flown over the first two months. Conversely, the Air Force, flying only 25 percent of the sorties, had delivered more than 75 percent of the total munitions expended, most of this precision guided munitions from B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers.¹² These statistics do not signify relative value of service or platforms, but instead illustrate the impact of distance on operations and the inherent capabilities and limitations unique to different types of forces and their weapons. U.S. Navy aircraft were the most readily available during early parts of the campaign

and could cover Afghan airspace for longer periods of time. Long-range Air Force bombers could deliver the most in terms of firepower. These different attributes influenced operational decision making. Distance limited on-station times of aircraft, thereby reducing the availability of close air support aircraft for ground forces. Bombers could pulverize enemy positions and attack several key targets on a single mission, but these attacks were generally not conducted in a synchronized manner with U.S. ground forces, though they were frequently vital to the success of United Front operations. These factors and limitations tended toward a succession of tactical engagements with cumulative operational level consequences rather than operational art in the truest sense. That is not to say that this was wrong or the incorrect application of military force, but it does suggest that further examination is appropriate with respect to the overall balance of forces and level of effort in this type of conflict.¹³ Integrating air and ground operations between widely dispersed forces is indeed challenging, even with global communications.

Effects on Centers of Gravity. U.S. bombing in conjunction with United Front attacks on key cities and enemy strongholds proved sufficient to bring about the Taliban's collapse, much sooner in fact than many had anticipated. SOF operations and conventional ground forces contributed significantly to this result. These actions all served to diminish Taliban control over major cities, weaken its central leadership and damage its military. Killing or capturing Bin Laden and other high-ranking Al-Qaeda members was a different matter. Although this enemy lacked sophisticated military equipment, they followed very disciplined security practices that have thus far stymied the technology employed by the U.S. Bin Laden's effective security practices and comparative HUMINT advantage has made him difficult to locate. In retrospect the only likely means of eliminating Bin Laden would have been a large-scale commitment of U.S. ground forces to the Tora Bora area in early December (assuming reports that he was there were

accurate). That would have greatly strained logistics capabilities and increased risks substantially.

Sequencing. *Enduring Freedom* appears to have followed a logical sequence of actions that resulted in military success. Initial shaping operations and support for United Front actions were conducted concurrently with force deployments. This was then followed by decisive combat operations leading to the collapse of the Taliban. Thereafter, consolidation and mopping up operations were conducted to locate and destroy remaining Taliban and Al-Qaeda units and to obtain useful intelligence. The operation is currently in this phase today while some post hostilities actions are also being conducted. In a war of this nature, the lines between specific phases and functions tend to become blurred. This aspect of counter-terrorism operations in the MOOTW environment is especially pertinent to the conflict termination or post hostilities phase of operations. It is extremely difficult to formulate an exit strategy once military operations have been successfully concluded if there is not a viable national government in place for the U.S. military and diplomatic authorities to deal with. This issue looms more important every day for the CINC and national leadership and will greatly influence U.S. planning, timing and overall capacity to initiate new campaigns or operations.

Synchronization. Synchronizing operational level activities--to include planning, command and control, intelligence maneuver, fires, logistics, force protection and integration with interagency activities—is one of the key components of operational art.¹⁴ This was accomplished with varying levels of success during *Enduring Freedom*. The criticism for not integrating operations more fully with the United Front has already been noted as well as the difficulty of synchronizing U.S. air and ground operations due to factors of space and distance. Valid or not, these areas at least demonstrate the difficulty of synchronizing military operations

within a coalition, especially in this type of war. In order to more fully evaluate operational level synchronization during *Enduring Freedom*, specific U.S. operational functions are next examined in this context.

Operational Functions

Even synchronization of operational functions within the U.S. military was not without its challenges. This was partly due to the nature of the area of operations but largely determined by the nature of the conflict. In MOOTW or counter terrorism operations it is inherently difficult to differentiate between operational and tactical level activities or to tie operational functions to higher-level objectives. For example, fires and maneuver appear to have limited applicability at the operational level in a conflict of this nature. These two functions remain essential to military success, but in an isolated country such as Afghanistan, without a truly in-depth system of national defense, military-industrial infrastructure or operational reserves, fires and maneuver are generally local and tactical in their effects. The operational functions that were most pertinent to the conduct of *Enduring Freedom*, C2, intelligence and logistics are discussed below.

Operational C2. U.S. technological means afforded CINCENT unmatched capabilities that included worldwide voice and video communications, satellite links, real time imagery and high-speed data processing equipment—all fed by a network of sensors and collections platforms. This provided an accurate operational picture and a faster decision making cycle than that of the enemy. This system was generally invulnerable to enemy interference on any meaningful scale and constituted one of the key operational advantages for U.S. forces. These capabilities are truly remarkable, but they do not in themselves resolve all difficulties inherent to

the command and control of widely dispersed forces. Arguably, this technological capability led to establishing a command structure that may have reduced operational effectiveness.

The CINC elected to fight the war operationally from his Tampa, Florida headquarters rather than displacing large portions of this C2 architecture to an undeveloped theater. A subordinate Joint Force Commander with overall authority and responsibility for this area of operations was never assigned. Component commanders directed some activities from their headquarters in the Persian Gulf, a Marine Brigadier General commanded the maritime task force assigned to Camp Rhino and an Army Major General was assigned to take command of all land forces during Operation Anaconda. Contrary to established doctrine, there was no single U.S. officer within the area of operations who exercised operational control much less command over all joint forces. The global reach of modern communications systems must have been among the primary reasons for this. There were other factors as well.

First, the distance between Afghanistan and Tampa was no more an impediment to effective C2 than would have been the distance between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan or Bahrain. Tampa provides an improved and relatively safe site for the bulk of CENTCOM headquarters personnel directly involved in this operation. Force protection and lift requirements to move a significant slice of that headquarters to the theater must have been additional considerations. Presumably, the CINC had to remain in close contact with other key players in the U.S. as well. Also, the large number of coalition partners involved may have made integration and C2 between them and U.S. forces difficult since no multi-national command existed or due to equipment incompatibilities. Many U.S. coalition partners dispatched high-ranking liaison officers to CENTCOM's headquarters in order to synchronize planning efforts and to coordinate operations. None of these reasons, valid as they may be, fully explains the decision not to

designate a single operational commander for this area of operations. This arrangement may or may not have degraded effective C2 during this operation. That will not become known until after action reports are issued a long time from now. Assigning a Joint Force Commander with overall responsibility for combat operations in Afghanistan would have at least freed the CINC to manage the theater as a whole while a capable subordinate fought the war.

Command and Control Warfare (C2W). Although the U.S. possessed an enormous advantage in C2W capabilities such as electronic warfare, civil affairs and PSYOPS, this area also poses operational challenges. Most advanced C2W systems are national level assets, which makes tasking approval, real time processing and analysis of intelligence (vice raw data) outside the CINC's and JFC's immediate control.¹⁵ This was a challenge during *Enduring Freedom*, but one that was largely overcome through use of liaison officers, the influence of high-ranking commanders and obviated by the near complete lack of a C2W capability on the part of the enemy.

Operational Intelligence. Similarly the U.S. had a far superior capability to develop intelligence, primarily in the areas of high technology surveillance, targeting and reconnaissance. Yet, there were distinct limits to the application of operational intelligence. High technology surveillance systems can monitor communications traffic and movement, but the rugged terrain of Afghanistan and the disciplined adherence to OPSEC procedures on the part of Al-Qaeda units left significant gaps in information. The limited numbers of available HUMINT specialists (whether intelligence agents, linguists, country experts or SOF forces) was a significant shortcoming. This HUMINT gap was mitigated largely through patience, an unprecedented degree of interagency cooperation and some extraordinary efforts by SOF units and intelligence

personnel. Regardless, the HUMINT capabilities of the U.S is an area that demands increased emphasis during subsequent campaigns.

Operational logistics. Theater level logistics was the chief enabler for U.S. forces, allowing tactical units to succeed in an inherently demanding area of operations. Bases in Diego Garcia, Okinawa, Guam, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Djibouti and elsewhere in the Middle East provided sufficient combat support and service support in spite of the daunting distances involved.¹⁶ This long lifeline was only possible due to the employment of long-range cargo aircraft such as the C-5, C-17 and C-130. Of particular note in this area was the capability of the C-17 and C-130 to operate from unimproved airfields with short (usually dirt) runways. Similarly, aerial refueling was an absolute necessity for Air Force and Navy aircraft to conduct tactical missions over Afghanistan. Refueling and tactical resupply of units in the field was principally conducted from bases in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Without an adequate theater level logistics system in place, and without intermediate bases and over-flight privileges obtained during the early days of the conflict, these tactical actions would have been difficult if not impossible to carry out.

The integration of operational functions was conducted with reasonable success during Enduring Freedom although some criticism has surfaced regarding the timing and synchronization of operations in support of the United Front and the perceived failure to trap all Al-Qaeda units inside Afghanistan. The integration of key operational functions such as C2, intelligence and logistics proved essential to the overall success of this operation thus far and demonstrates the applicability of operational art to a counter-terrorism campaign.

Conclusion and Tentative Lessons Learned

It is still far too early to assess the overall effectiveness of operational art during Operation Enduring Freedom. It is an ongoing campaign, and the final results are by no means certain. However, it is never too soon to begin examining lessons learned in a conflict, even if they are tentative and require modification later. It is equally important to emphasize that any such lessons may or may not apply to future campaigns where objectives and conditions may vary considerably.

The positive lessons in this operation are many and merit first mention. First the combined military-political effort to build coalitions and secure basing and over-flight rights proved essential in overcoming the substantial geographic limitations in this campaign. Closely related is the enormous importance of interagency cooperation and integration between federal agencies such as the State Department, CIA and the Department of Defense. The establishment of an effective theater level logistics system is another key lesson learned in this campaign. This system itself is dependent upon the support of the U.S. Transportation Command. The C-17 aircraft has proven its worth during *Enduring Freedom*, but already, concerns have been voiced about over-utilization of this remarkable but scarce asset. The flexibility inherent to forward deployed naval forces proved especially useful. CVBGs and ARG/MEUs overcame the challenges of distance (with a lot of Air Force assistance) and provided the CINC essential combat power early in the campaign while forces were flowing into the theater. The importance of Precision Guided Munitions (PGM) is another key consideration. PGMs allowed limited numbers of long-range aircraft to attack several targets during a single mission while considerably reducing collateral damage and civilian casualties. Some have criticized the over-utilization of PGMs. That criticism is moot. The U.S. will need PGMs to fight this kind of war,

and will simply have to buy more of them. The importance of Joint doctrine and training has been further emphasized by this campaign. Widely dispersed Army, Marine and SOF units were supported by Air Force, Navy and Marine aircraft and were dependent upon joint assets and agencies for their intelligence and logistics. Common terminology and procedures and interoperable equipment and communications will become increasingly important to counter-terrorism operations. Finally, it should be evident now that integration of military activities with humanitarian relief operations and Non-governmental organizations will be an inseparable part of future conflicts.

Some of the criticisms of the conduct of *Enduring Freedom* bear discussion here as well, but only inasmuch as they contribute to an understanding of the future issues and challenges military planners may confront in future campaigns. It is not the intent of this paper to criticize operational decisions absent significant amounts of information or final results, but instead to focus some attention on areas of importance. Evaluations and assessments can come later.

Some initially criticized a seemingly slow pace of operations, the lack of early and timely support for United Front actions or for the failure thus far to kill, capture or otherwise trap Osama Bin Laden and other senior Al-Qaeda leaders. The decision to commit forces to a given operation or engagement is always dependent upon available resources and combat power and the level of risk involved. It also should be governed by the relative importance of the objective. How these issues were presented to and decided upon by the CINC is undetermined just now, nor is it appropriate to judge decisions without all the facts. Nevertheless, it points to an important issue for future campaigns concerning the tempo of operations and the level of risk that is appropriate to capture or kill terrorist leadership.

Command and control is another chief area of concern. In the immediate aftermath of an apparent military success, there are many touting the network centric style C2 system that has provided true global reach during *Enduring Freedom*. Whether this reach entails equivalent effectiveness and utility is a question that participating tactical and operational commanders must closely examine. If the CENTCOM structure truly optimized command and control, then perhaps doctrine should be rewritten. If not, then, at the very least, the value of designating a Joint Force Commander within within an area of operations should be assessed.

If combat operations occur in another failed state such as Afghanistan, the complexities of conflict termination will prove problematic once again. With the disintegration of the Taliban, there was no enemy leadership for U.S. military leaders or diplomats to deal with. This has left conflict termination up in the air. Unable to dictate terms to an enemy, U.S. leaders then had to turn to interim government leaders whose longevity and legitimacy in the eyes of the population at large were uncertain. This opens up the prospects of an extended presence for the purpose of nation building and preservation of social order—activities that are not in consonance with the initial objectives of either the President or the CINC. This is an issue that has not yet begun to play out in Afghanistan, but it is conceivable that the U.S. may find itself mired down in a post hostilities phase with no true conflict termination phase or exit strategy being fixed.

In conclusion, operational art plays an unmistakable and essential role in the global war on terrorism. Its practice requires modification in some areas, but the essential tenets and processes apply to unconventional conflicts like *Enduring Freedom* as they do to major theater wars. Any debate with respect to how well operational art was applied during *Enduring Freedom* will have to wait upon more information and new developments. Until then, it is safe to say that operational art will play an indispensable role in the war on terror.

Appendix I: Force Comparison, Operation Enduring Freedom as of 17 Jan 2002

	Taliban	Al Qaeda	UF /NIM	U.S.	Coalition
Manpower	45,000 - 60000	3,500 – 5,000	60,000 – 120,000*	50,000 in theater, 5,000 in country	3,800
Air Forces	Negligible		Some SU-22 and helicopters	Est 500 combat acft plus transports#	Coalition acft included w/ U.S.
Naval Forces	None		None	Over 40 warships	Over 60 warships and support ships
Artillery	480		110	Unknown	Unknown
APC	430		160	Unknown	Unknown
Tanks	400		100	Unknown	Unknown
Air Defense	Limited SA-2/SA-3, SA-13, SA-7/14, Stinger and ADA		Limited Manpads and ADA	Effective AD countermeasures / tactics	Effective AD countermeasures / tactics
Ballistic Missiles	Scud B Frog 7		Scud B Frog 7	Sophisticated guided cruise missiles	Sophisticated guided cruise missiles
SOF	None		None	Several hundred	Several hundred

Appendix II:. Force Comparison Operation Enduring Freedom as of 17 Jan 2002¹⁷

Reliable civilian analysts' estimates place the number of U.S. and coalition military aircraft available to the CINC for this operation in excess of 1000.

*Includes Afghan national army and National Islamic Movement (NIM) forces under General Dostam. UF and other Afghani opposition force numbers are difficult to verify. These numbers include part time soldiers that often do not have significant training or modern equipment.

Appendix II: Notional Phases for Operation Enduring Freedom

Phase	Description	Objectives	Actions	Key Events / Timeframe
I	Force Deployment and Shaping / Initial Combat Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Gain air supremacy -Establish lodgments in N. Afghanistan -Support United Front (UF) attacks to seize control of major cities. -Destroy/Disrupt Taliban & Al-Qaeda C2 -Inflict attrition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Secure over-flight rights -Establish bases -Deploy forces - Intel gathering - Limited strikes -SOF insertion -Shaping operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -6 Oct – 6 Nov -CVBG / ARG/MEU to Indian Ocean -USAF units to Diego Garcia, Uzbekistan -10th Mt Div to Uzbekistan -Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad bombed -SOF Commando raid on Al-Qaeda command complex near Kandahar -Ak Kupruk and Keshendeh captured by UF forces
II	Decisive Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Defeat enemy forces fighting UF in north (Mazar-e-Sharif) -Defeat enemy forces in east (Kabul) -Defeat enemy forces in south (Kandahar) -Defeat enemy forces in west (Herat) --Deny Taliban control of key cities and MSRs -Taliban removed from power -Al Qaeda Forces Destroyed or Captured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased air strikes -SOF direct action -Stepped up support for UF -Deploy ground forces (USMC/USA) -Intel exploitation -WMD location -Humanitarian Relief -Psyops / CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -7 Nov – 16 Dec -UF forces capture Mazar-e-Sharif -UF forces seize Taloqan, Qala-e-Nao, -UF forces seize Kabul, Kandahar -Mohammed Attef killed -Mullah Faizal (senior Taliban commander in Afghanistan) surrenders to Dostam -UF forces capture Konduz -UF forces capture Herat -US Marine TF establish Camp Rhino vcty Kandahar -Mullah Omar surrenders Kandahar, Taliban falls 7 Dec -Tora Bora complex captured by UF forces 16 Dec
III	Consolidation / Sustainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Destroy / Capture remaining Taliban & Al Qaeda resistance -Prevent enemy from escaping across Pakistan and Iran borders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ground combat and air strikes -Psyops -Intel exploitation/ WMD search -Humanitarian relief -Security assist / training - Land mine removal / Engineering -Humanitarian relief / NGO protection -Counter Drug 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -17 Dec to present -Continued mop up of tactical units -Operation Anadconda 1 – 15 March
IV	Post Hostilities Actions, Redeployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stable Afghan government in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Security assist training -Limited nation building -Intel gathering / exploitation -Counter Drug -Land Mine Removal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -TBD – TBD --Re-deploy, Refit -Prepare for follow-on campaigns

Notes

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- ¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Doctrine Capstone and Keystone Primer*, Joint Pub 1 (Washington, DC: 10 September 2001). pp. 34-35.
- ² "Campaign Against Terrorism."
<www.whitehouse.gov/March11/Campaignagainstterrorism.pdf>
- ³ Vego, Milan N. *Operational Warfare*, Newport, RI: Naval War College publication NWC1004, 2000. pg. 29
- ⁴ "Afghanistan." *CIA Fact Book On Line*. <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>>
- ⁵ "Air Route Times," and "Sea Route Times." from <<http://www.atinet.org/~steve/cs150/>>
- ⁶ "War Plan Series Part 2: The Afghan Theater of Operations." *Strategic Forecasting LLC*. 25 Sept 2001. <www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis/200828> [6 April 2002].
- ⁷ Vego. pg. 438.
- ⁸ "War Plan Series Part 2: The Afghan Theater of Operations." *Strategic Forecasting LLC*. 25 Sept 2001. <www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis/200828> [6 April 2002].
- ⁹ Unclassified portions of briefings given by NAVCENT and MARCENT briefers at Naval War College, Newport, RI on 15 and 22 April 2002.
- ¹⁰ Commanding Officer, 15th MEU "Unclassified Deployment After Action Report," (Microsoft Power Point presentation) 25 April 2002. Part II, slide 15 of 24, dated 25 April 2002.
- ¹¹ 1 November 2001 interview of General Franks on NBC television *Today*,
<http://www.centcom.mil/news/transcripts/20011101NBC_Franks.html>
and 10 March 2002 interview of General Franks on ABC television *This Week with Sam Donaldson and Cokie Roberts*,
<<http://www.centcom.mil/news/transcripts/Sam/20Donaldson/20Interview/20with/20General/20Tommy/20Franks.htm>>
- ¹² "Operation Enduring Freedom -- Operations." *Global Security*. 4 April 2002.
<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom-ops.htm>>
[10 April 2002].
- ¹³ The use of tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) has somewhat offset the operational limitations of conventional aircraft. UAVs can readily operate from austere bases and have provided the necessary loiter time to provide early warning of enemy movements in addition to targeting and limited strike capabilities utilizing Hellfire missiles. UAV usage during *Enduring Freedom* represents a significant tactical adaptation to overcome operational limitations.
- ¹⁴ Vego. pg. 185.

¹⁵ Unclassified information from briefing given by NAVCENT briefer at Naval War College, Newport, RI on 15 April 2002.

¹⁶ “Operation Enduring Freedom--Operations.” *Global Security*. 4 April 2002.
<<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom-ops.htm>>
[10 April 2002].

¹⁷ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/endingfreedom_orbat-01.htm> and
<<http://www.gisresearch.com/online/Afghanistan.htm#Defense>>. Accurate order of battle is extremely difficult to estimate at this time, as most U.S. force levels remain classified. Comparing overall Taliban and Al-Qaeda numbers to the number and type of U.S. and coalition forces in theater and in country leaves a definite impression of a mismatch that favors the Americans inasmuch as tally sheets determine military effectiveness.

¹⁸ Information in this table was extrapolated from information on U.S. operations in Afghanistan on Global Information System: <<http://www.gisresearch.com/online/Afghanistan.htm#defense>>. This table is not intended to represent the plans or phasing employed by CINCENT, but rather to serve as a notional model of how various tactical actions reported in open sources conceivably fit into an operational scheme.

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